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WILL YOU LABOR FOR SALVATION?

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The present life is a scene of travail—conflict—weariness. Often, as we pass through it, are we like the Israelites wandering in the wilderness, when "the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way." With what a fainting heart we see the years wear slowly on; while, one after another, toils and trials strew our path, "thick as autumnal leaves," and sharper than hedges of thorns? But, in the life to come, "there remaineth a rest to the people of God;" an unbroken and enduring rest, whose sweet dawn opens on the soul at the instant of release from suffering, dying flesh, but whose perfect consummation is reserved for the times when Christ, who is our life, shall appear," and His disciples "shall also appear with Him in glory." It was with his eye fixed on that blissful scene, with his heart panting after it, with his feet pressing toward it, that the apostle Paul uttered to his own generation, and through them to us, the solemn injunction, "Let us *labor*, therefore, to enter into *that* rest." (Heb 4; 11) May we ask you, reader, to dwell with patient thoughtfulness on the lessons which that injunction conveys to us?

There is an *implied* lesson in it It clearly proceeds on the supposition, that we may effect an entrance into the heavenly rest. If this be not true, the injunction to seek it, takes form as bitter and shameless mockery, like the words of the railers who wagging their heads, urged Christ to descend from the cross, believing all the while that it was beyond His power to come down. But the language of the apostle is the language of frankness and earnestness. He speaks, because "the city of the blessed" has gates that "stand open day and night" He speaks, because between those gates and ourselves no barriers rise which our feet may not surmount, if we steadily tread the way of truth. And this is most precious doctrine. Heathenism taught men to frame their guilty fears into the horrible idea of a "Fate," which "had no head and could not think," which "had no heart and could not feel," but which had an iron, resistless hand sweeping a defenceless race into an inevitable ruin The gospel shines on this spectre, and as it melts away, we behold, instead, Christ the only "Fate" of man; Christ who "came into the world to save sinners;" Christ who gave His flesh for the life of the world; Christ, the often rejected, the never rejecting! Like nature's sun this Sun of righteousness shines for all. The water of life flows freely for *whosoever* will take it. All may eat of "the bread which cometh down from heaven;" for that bread, as our Redeemer himself declares, "giveth life unto *the world*." It stands, then, as a truth which cannot be shaken, that every one of us *may* effect an entrance into the heavenly rest.

But *will* we? If we would, we must give earnest heed to the lesson *expressed* in the apostolic injunction. We must remember that to effect an entrance into the heavenly rest demands "labor." Not manual labor; for in this

case, "bodily exercise profiteth nothing." But that harder labor of the *mind* and of the *heart*, which calls for greater industry than any merely physical toil. There is an evil nature that must be changed. There are evil habits which must be broken off. There are evil maxims or rules of conduct which must be renounced. There are evil examples which must be resisted. These things demand the strenuous exercise of the inner man unto godliness. And without this labor of the mind and of the heart none enter into "*that* rest." Thus, it is written: "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth; Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors, and their works do follow them." As if to proclaim, that none die in the Lord, none are blessed in their death, except those who have works which may follow them and labors from which they may rest! He who dreams of saving his soul on any easier terms, will be awakened by its loss. Men may slumber while the tide drifts them toward the gulf of perdition; but the gulf swallows them up—and there are no slumberers there. *Wrath* opens, never to close again, the eyes which were shut, which were willingly and wilfully blind, to *grace*. Many will see, when it is too late to profit by it, that their destruction is greatly owing to their not perceiving clearly, and deeply feeling, how necessary labor is, in order to an entrance into the heavenly rest."

Suffer, then, dear reader, from one who loves your souls, a few exhortations resting on this vital doctrine.

I. *Think it not strange* that "labor" should be necessary, if we would effect an entrance into the heavenly rest. There is nothing strange about it.

The same law applies to the things of the present life. *Their* price is labor. On this point, revelation, which is

the only divine teacher, and experience, which is the best human teacher, read the same lesson to us. An often quoted text of Scripture might, without violence to the original, have been translated: "Man is born unto *labor* as the sparks fly upward." (Job, 5; 7.) This is the penalty of sin; "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground." (Gen, 3; 19) This is the law of righteousness: "Six days shalt thou labor and do all thy work." (Ex. 20 9.) Whether we regard God, therefore, as a Sovereign avenging rebellion against Him, or as a Legislator prescribing the measure of obedience to Him, we find equal evidence, that, according to His purpose, man, as respects the present life, is, and must be, a *laborer*—in mind, in body, in both. Those who attempt practically to annul the "constitution of nature and the course of Providence" in this regard, pluck down manifold evils on themselves. So the proverbs of divine revelation teach: "I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding, and lo, it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall thereof was broken down. Then I saw, and considered it well: I looked upon it, and received instruction. Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep; so shall thy poverty come as one that traveleth," that is, come swiftly, "and thy want as an armed man," that is, irresistibly. (Prov. 24, 30--34.) Of like sort is the teaching of the proverbs of human experience: "Idleness is the key of beggary;" "Sloth is the mother of poverty." As the general rule, then, toilsome exertion is necessary in order to secure whatever men of the world set their hearts on. Earth holds all

things at that rate, and yields them up into our possession and enjoyment at no lower cost.

Now, why should not this law apply equally to the things of the life to come? Why should sloth be the mother of eternal riches, and idleness the key of heaven? Why should those who by doing nothing lose all the blessings of this mortal state, hope nevertheless, while doing nothing, to inherit all the blessings of the state immortal? The expectation carries absurdity upon its very face. Analogy forbids it. The God of nature is the God of the Bible. His kingdom rules alike over the present world and the next. Is it not reasonable to conclude, then, that these two departments of one and the same kingdom, should be constituted on one and the same principle? that the necessity for labor, applying to the treasures of the one, should apply to the treasures of the other also? that in both, if in either, God should suspend the things we need upon effort and toil? It is not strange, therefore, that our Saviour should say: "*Strive* to enter in at the strait gate." (Lu. 13; 24) It is not strange that one of his disciples should say: "*Work out* your own salvation with fear and trembling;" (Phil. 2; 12,) and another; "*Give diligence* to make your calling and election sure." (2. Pet. 1; 10.) It is not strange that to effect an entrance into the heavenly rest demands *labor*. Nay, it would be strange, unaccountably strange, if this were not the case. Who could explain the obvious inconsistency, if the God of nature gave nothing here to inactivity, and the God of the Bible gave all things to it hereafter? There is no such inconsistency in Jehovah. It is amazing that even the most heedless of men should be so blind as to suppose there is. Scarcely a stronger

instance can be found, of the power of a warped vision to wink great and vital truth out of sight.

II. *Do not refuse* to seek an entrance into the heavenly rest, because "labor" is necessary to effect it. The fruit of that labor would repay you for its weariness—if this weariness were aggravated a thousand-fold—and if that fruit were diminished a million-fold. How much more certain, satisfying, enduring, are its rewards than the rewards of earthly labor. Let us lay open this thought together.

(1.) *Labor for the things of the present life is uncertain.* You may prepare yourself for one of the professions. Much money and years of study may be expended in securing proper qualification for it. And that qualification may be yours. Still, though you deserve success, you may not be able to command it. Competitors, perhaps less competent than yourself, may jostle you aside in the eager race after professional emolument or professional distinction; and while they float on the full tide, you may lie stranded and wrecked on the beach. "The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favor to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to all." (Eccl 9; 11.)

You may till the ground; rising early, sitting up late; rivalling the industry of Jacob, who said, "In the day the heat consumed me, and the frost by night." But though you carry much seed out into the field, you may gather little in. God may call for a drought upon the land, and upon the corn, and upon the wheat, and upon all that the ground brings forth. Your harvest may be smitten with blasting, and with mildew, and with hail. The toil of the year may return to you empty-handed. What you

have spent your strength for, and your time, may "be as the grass upon the house-tops, which withereth afore it groweth up, wherewith the mower filleth not his hand, nor he that bindeth sheaves his bosom." And if the heavens grant rain and fruitful seasons to the husbandman, you may be stricken down into a cheerless grave, while others gather the produce of your fields into the barn, and watch the rise and fall of markets, and sell when prices are at the highest, and count over the abundant profit, won but not enjoyed by you?

He that earns wages, may earn them, only to put them into a bag with holes. The gains of a long life, adventured upon some speculation of fair but false promise, or deposited for safe keeping in a failing bank, or loaned to one on the verge of insolvency, or eaten by the tongue of fire, or swept with the besom of merciless war, may perish in a single hour, and leave behind them nothing but vain repining and hopeless beggary to your gray hairs.

Such are the uncertainties which hang over earthly labor. But *labor for the things of the life to come cannot fail of success.*

Those who perform this work of the Lord, perform sure work—the only work which *must* be crowned with reward. So felt the apostle Paul, when he exhorted his beloved brethren to be steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as they *knew* that their labor was not in vain in the Lord.

It is impossible that repentance and faith should come to nought. That they should fall as water spilled upon the ground, without procuring acceptance with the Friend of sinners, is impossible. Has not that merciful and faithful Saviour said, "Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out?" (Jno. 6; 37) These are His words;

and has he not also said, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away?" (Matt. 24: 35.). Faith and repentance, then, cannot fail of success; but those who exercise them shall be satisfied with favor, and full with the blessing of the Lord.

Equally is this true of Christian fidelity. Christian fidelity *must* abide in Christ's love. "The beloved of the Lord shall dwell in safety by Him." (Deut. 33; 12.) Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate Fidelity from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. "My sheep," said the Redeemer, "hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish; neither shall any pluck them out of my hand." (Jno. 10; 27, 28.)

Mark the contrast in this particular. You labor for the things of the present life, in the midst of great uncertainty; not knowing whether you shall obtain compensation for your efforts; running the risk of closing a toilsome life in want and penury. In this you do well. But what show of reason can you present for refusing to labor that you may effect an entrance into the heavenly rest, assured as you are by the entire word of God, that your efforts are attended by an absolute certainty of success,—that there is not anything which can by possibility subject you to final disappointment! Are you willing to be workers where you may gain nothing, and not where you must gain all things? Do not pass this consideration by. Our Saviour himself appeals to the uncertainty of earthly things and the certainty of heavenly things, and grounds one of His own solemn counsels on it: "Lay not up for

yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal." (Matt. 6; 19, 20.) That is, prefer the sure labor to the unsure. Give not your supreme affection and most strenuous effort to the things which may elude your grasp: there are things which cannot deceive you, give them rather to these. Oh, if you will not hear us, hear the Lord Jesus.

(2) The things of the present life for which we labor, if we obtain them, are *unsatisfying*. It is not in their power to fill the capacious, to quiet the restless, heart of man. We have many testimonies to this effect.

Take that of the Caliph Abdalrahman. An authentic memorial, found in his closet after death, says: "I have now reigned above fifty years in victory or peace, beloved by my subjects, dreaded by my enemies, and respected by my allies. Riches and honors, power and pleasure, have waited on my call, nor does any earthly blessing appear to have been wanting to my felicity. In this situation I have diligently numbered the days of pure and genuine happiness which have fallen to my lot; they amount to *fourteen*. O man! place not thy confidence in the present world!"

No less emphatic is the result of the experience of Solomon, as recorded by himself. "What hath man of all his labor, and of the vexation of his heart, wherein he hath labored under the sun? For all his days are sorrows and his travail grief; his heart taketh not rest in the night." (Eccl 2; 22, 23) "He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver, nor he that loveth abundance with increase." (Eccl 5; 10) This, be it remembered,

is the language of one, who, as the Scriptures tell us, "exceeded all the kings of the earth for riches and for wisdom." His riches placed him in circumstances in which he might form an intelligent judgment as to the value of earthly things; his wisdom qualified him to judge correctly. And the conclusion he reached has been embodied in the memorable sentence, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity!"

Our labor, then, if given to the present world, and if successful, secures that which does not, cannot, satisfy the soul immortal. But labor for the things of the life to come secures *joy unspeakable and full of glory.*

When these laborers are "beautified with salvation," God shall set them before His face, and Christ shall set them on His throne. "They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes," (Rev. 7; 16, 17). No deferred or disappointed hopes are there. No fears cloud the spirit. No shafts of regret pierce the bosom. No separations invade that hallowed fellowship; no warring passions embitter it; no stern estrangements chill it. All is love, and purity, and peace. Sin, out of which every sorrow flows, shall be there unknown; for the spirits of just men are made perfect there. *Heaven* shall be their home; and their inheritance, GOD. Oh, to say that such an abode and such a reward are "satisfying," is language too tame and cold for Christian ears to endure it! And we must find angelic lips to speak its glories forth.

Lay this difference to heart. You labor for the things of the present life despite their unsatisfying nature—de-

spite their inability to make up for the soul a portion which shall content it—despite the universal testimony of experience that as they increase, cares, and pains, and disappointments, increase with them. In this, you act rightly. But how can you justify yourselves, in that you refuse to labor to effect an entrance into the heavenly rest —that rest on which no shadow of discontent or grief can ever fall—that rest which shines with all the rays of an unalloyed and an infinite blessedness? Are you willing to be workers for that which leaves you destitute of sufficing happiness, and not for that which guarantees such happiness, in fuller measure than human heart can now conceive? Disregard not this thought. God has deemed it of sufficient importance to be spoken by the mouth of His prophet:—"Wherefore do you spend money for that which is not bread? and your labor for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness." (Isa. 55; 2) Oh, if this question be of such worth, that one of the sons of men was fitly inspired to urge it, it should claim *your* instant, earnest meditation. Can you innocently refuse to ponder it?

(3) The things of the present life, for which we labor, if we obtain them, and if they might satisfy us, can be ours *but for a little while.*

Death removes them out of our possession. Man, when summoned from this world, leaves them all behind him. "As he came forth from his mother's womb, naked shall he return to go as he came, and shall take nothing of his labor which he may carry away in his hand. In all points, as he came so shall he go: and what profit hath he that hath labored for the wind?" (Eccl. 5; 16) "We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can

carry nothing out." (1 Tim. 6; 7) All are poor in the grave. Houses and lands, gold and silver, honor, and pleasure, and friends,—these are withdrawn from every one that "giveth up the ghost." Other eyes than the eyes of the miser will look upon his hidden stores then; other hands than his, buy, and sell, and get gain, with them. The last hour comes; and in the twinkling of an eye, the millionaire is penniless. The dead are owners of nothing on the whole face of the earth—of nothing except so much ground as may supply a resting place to their mouldering forms—and not always of that! Now, this is what you labor for, as respects the present life—this instant and total bankruptcy—this absolute destitution of the grave—this losing all things—this having nothing.

But labor for the things of the life to come secures "an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that *fadeth not away.*"

"This is the promise that God hath promised us, even *eternal* life," (1 Jno. 2; 25,) life that ends not ever. The worshippers in the Upper Temple "shall go no more out." (Rev. 3; 12.) Fifteen hundred years after the death of Abel, a flood of waters from the fountains of the great deep and from the windows of heaven, was sweeping the old world that sinned, into a righteous destruction. But during those fifteen hundred years Abel had been in the unbroken enjoyment of the heavenly rest, and looked down upon "the sea without a shore" which had buried all nations underneath its waves, and saw the ark which floated with eight persons above the universal grave. Yet other two thousand three hundred years—and in a manger at Bethlehem a little child was lying, which was Christ the Lord, and angels on Judea's plain were hymning the anthem of His incarnation as the Sav-

iour of sinners. But Abel's enjoyment of the heavenly rest had been prolonged without a pause, through these two thousand, three hundred years, and he took up the echo of that song before the Throne, and struck his lyre of praise afresh with glad fingers. Eighteen hundred and sixty years more—and the times on which we have fallen are spreading out the strange mystery of their good, the stranger mystery of their evil, before the eye of Heaven. But through their long lapse the enjoyment of the heavenly rest has been Abel's still. Oh, who can picture to his imagination the Fifty-Seven Centuries during which that first martyr has walked in white before the Father's presence—holy—happy—without one stain of sin, however slight—without one pang of grief however transient? And yet these Fifty-Seven Centuries, are scarcely the beginning of the beginning of the glory and the joy which have no end—which await *you*, though you be the humblest of all laborers for the heavenly rest!

Seriously consider this contrast. You labor for the things of the present life, aware, if you obtain them, and if you enjoy them, that death shall cast you out from their possession; not dreaming, even in the wildest moment, that they can be yours in the grave, or beyond it; sure that an inevitable hour, an hour "nigh at hand to come," shall strike them every one from your grasp. In this, you are without blame. But oh, with what plea will you excuse, even to yourself, your failure to labor that you may effect an entrance into the heavenly rest; may become "rich unto God;" may win the unfading, the eternal inheritance? Are you willing to be workers where the fruit of your toils must, by and bye, pass from you forever, and not where it shall be forever secure—forever enhancing? Do not drive this thought from your bosom.

He whose blood was shed in your behalf accounted it not unmeet for utterance by Himself. "Labor not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give unto you: for Him hath God the Father sealed." (Jno. 6; 27) Oh, shall *He* speak, and not gain your ear, and not subdue your heart?

III *Hope not* that by refusing to labor to effect an entrance into the heavenly rest, you shall escape all labor. A far sorer travail of soul awaits you, in working out your ruin. Christ, in the days of his flesh, cried, "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." From these words we gather—first, that sinners are laboring under their sins, which, as a burden grievous to be borne, are bound upon their souls—and secondly, that in comparison with this laboring under sins, the Christian's labor to be delivered from them is itself a rest. Oh, turn then on this truth a serious eye: *Ye who will not labor to enter into the heavenly rest, labor, and shall labor, under your sins.*

(1.) You labor under their *power*. They rule you. You serve them. Their evil pleasure will they constrain you to do. All the iniquitous deeds which blacken the annals of the world, are proofs of the power of sins. What may they not bring you to perform? Much from which you once recoiled, they make you do now; much from which you recoil now, they will make you do hereafter. There are no such hard task-masters under the sun as they!

(2) You labor under their *guilt*. They condemn you. They waken all the thunders of Sinai against *you*. They point the sword of Infinite Justice at *your* bosom. All the displays of God's wrath which light up warning fires,

as it were, along the path of man's history, are proofs of the guilt of sins. They drowned the old world under the flood. They rained down devouring flame on Sodom and Gomorrah. What may they not cause you to endure on earth? What must they not compel you to suffer in hell?

(3.) You labor under their *shame*. They dishonor you. When God is the Father—how great the reproach of being a disobedient child? When Christ is the King—how great the reproach of being a rebel against the throne? All the infamy which crimsons the pages of the past, is proof of the shame of sins. What deep disgrace may they not fix on your name yet?

(4.) You labor under their *disappointment*. They deceive and betray you. They make promises which they cannot keep. They inspire hopes which they cannot fulfil. Thorns are under their flowers; their apples turn to ashes on the lips; you lean upon their reed, it breaks, and pierces your side. All the sighs which have ever burst from human bosoms, all the tears which have ever fallen from human eyes, all the regrets, disquietudes and fears which have ever shed gall and bitterness on human hearts, are proofs of the disappointment of sins. Oh, is there a sorrow into whose turbid stream they may not plunge you!

Such is your labor, under the power, the guilt, the shame, the disappointment of sins. And you have no helpers like those who stand by the feeblest subject and servant of Christ. CONSCIENCE is against you, in laboring under your sins—conscience, which would be on your side in laboring to enter the heavenly rest. And he whose conscience is against him cannot be strong! GOD is against you in laboring under your sins—God, who would be on your side in laboring to enter the heavenly

rest. And he who has God against him must be weak—unutterably weak!

Consider now, these different kinds of labor—this work of Satan on the one hand—this work of God on the other. The one or the other must be done. We must enter heaven laboring, or laboring enter hell. Make your choice between them. Which master will you serve—God or Satan? Which wages will you have—eternal life or eternal death? Oh, determine wisely. Determine *now*: "to-morrow's sun may shine upon your grave."

Decide *now* whether you will perform the "labor" necessary to effect an entrance into the heavenly rest. Every promise of Holy Scripture asks that question. Every drop of the blood of Christ asks it. Every monition of the Spirit of grace asks it. Every day of the forbearance of God asks it. How will you answer? If you are moved to answer aright, there are three things that you will do.

(1) *You will begin your labor at once.* You will dread delay as the very gate of perdition. "Choose you this day whom you will serve." (Josh. 24; 15.) *Immediate* labor alone is wise.

(2) *You will suffer no obstruction to interrupt your labor.* A half-hearted performance will strike you as real neglect. You will see self-murder in it. "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease while I leave it and come down to you?" (Neh. 6; 3.) *Diligent* labor alone can accomplish anything.

(3) *You will cease from your labor only with the ceasing of life.* To abandon it before death, will seem to you as worse than death itself. "We are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end." (Heb. 3; 14.) *Persevering* labor alone lays its hand on the crown of glory.

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